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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### HE'S WORSE THAN ME

#### *The Eurosceptic parties at the turning point*

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**ABSTRACT:** One of the most important reasons for the expansion of Eurosceptic parties is the worsening of the economic crisis. This and, more generally, the processes of globalization/denationalization have not had the same effects for all citizens; a new structural conflict, opposing the “winners” and “losers” of globalization, has arisen.

Usually the mainstream political parties tend to take the “winners” side, while the peripheral parties tend to adopt a “loser’s” programme and to use Euroscepticism as a mobilizing issue; the electoral constituency of the Eurosceptic parties is therefore formed, above all, by the “losers” of globalization.

The 2014 European elections represented an important turning point for the Eurosceptic parties; they obtained an unprecedentedly large percentage of votes, but no “political earthquake”, “sweeps”, or “Europe’s populist backlash” occurred. The Eurosceptic parties have never been able to form a joint anti-European front, because of their mutual mistrust. “He’s worse than me”, could be the statement that best epitomizes the relationships within the Eurosceptic right-wing camp.

A further exacerbation of the economic crisis and/or the inability of the EU institutions in addressing it could lead such parties towards new and more considerable achievements.

**KEYWORDS:** Economic crisis, European elections, Euroscepticism, Eurosceptic parties, Populism

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## 1. Introduction

Over the years, the issue of European integration has acquired greater salience. Because of the intensification and spread of the economic crisis, the media, politicians and scholars have devoted particular attention to two issues: the activities of the European Parliament (EP) which, more or less effectively, could tackle the effects of the crisis and secondly the consequences of the enlargement process. This attention has often been expressed in unkind tones – Matteo Renzi, for instance, on presenting the agenda of the Italian Presidency of the Council to the EP, asserted: “if Europe took a *selfie* today, the image would be one of tiredness, resignation, and boredom (...) regaining the European soul and the deep meaning of our being together is the great challenge (...) we have to regain an identity”.

In this regard, Edoardo Bressanelli, referring to the 2004 European elections, noted the paramount role of “Europe” within party manifestos and platforms, especially those developed by right-wing, conservative, and new-populist forces (Bressanelli 2010; see also Scott and Steenbergen 2004 and Netjies and Binnema 2007); the European Union (EU), therefore, would have ceased to be a “sleeping giant”, in other words, an issue not covered by political parties (Van der Eijk and Franklin 2004).

Nevertheless, turnout in elections has been decreasing since the 1979 European election, reaching its lowest rate of 43 per cent in 2009 and 2014. Voters, therefore, regarded European elections as “second-order” elections: public opinion accorded little importance to the outcome of these elections; the voters would punish governing parties, while the opposition and protest parties would achieve their best results (Reiff and Schmitt 1980; Van der Eijk and Franklin 1996). Furthermore, citizens’ trust in European institutions has decreased. Examining Eurobarometer data, we observe that the EU and EP appear to be affected by a general loss of popularity; the percentages of respondents who have a negative image of the EU and those who are against a European economic and monetary union with a single currency (EMU), the euro, have also steadily increased (Fig. 1). The “permissive consensus” toward European integration, which began to decline with the negative outcomes of referendums on European issues – the rejections of the Constitutional Treaty in the French and Dutch referendums (2005), for instance – appears to be almost completely eroded.

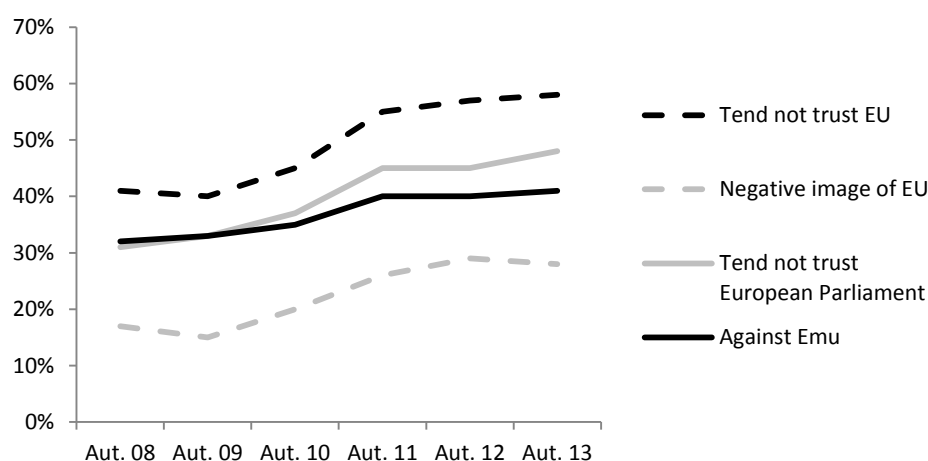
Against this background, one could have expected excellent performance by the Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 European elections; according to *Open Europe* estimates ([http://www.openeurope.org.uk/Content/Documents/140428\\_EP\\_Briefing\\_Open\\_Europe.pdf](http://www.openeurope.org.uk/Content/Documents/140428_EP_Briefing_Open_Europe.pdf)), reported in the main newspapers of all European countries, the anti-EU, anti-austerity, anti-immigrant and anti-establishment parties should have won 30.9 per cent

of the vote and 218 seats – “headlines of ‘earthquakes’ and ‘sweeps’”, observed Cass Mudde (2014), “were being printed by an impatient press that had been foretelling ‘Europe’s populist backlash’ for almost a year”<sup>1</sup>.

Due to the worsening of the crisis and its greater impact on the lives of citizens, the 2014 European elections could have represented an important turning point for the Eurosceptic parties. However, what was the actual outcome? Did the Eurosceptic parties truly achieve extraordinary election results? In the event that they did, were these results consistent throughout Europe? What consequences are likely to arise with respect to the European integration process?

This article intends to answer these questions; however, it is first necessary to focus on the nature and characteristics of the so-called Eurosceptic parties.

Figure 1. Attitudes toward EU, European Parliament and EMU (EU 28)<sup>2</sup>



Source: Elaboration of data from Standard Eurobarometer 70: Autumn 2008 - Standard Eurobarometer 80: Autumn 2013.

<sup>1</sup> *Open Europe* is a British independent think tank that considers the future direction of the European Union and, more generally, all aspects of EU policy.

<sup>2</sup> I chose to analyse the trend of attitudes since 2008, when the crisis broke out.

## 2. The Eurosceptic parties

The term “Eurosceptic parties” does not refer to a specific and particular family of parties, as might be the case for the Greens or the Communist parties; it instead includes those parties, generally holding different ideologies, objectives and programs, that share similar sceptical attitudes towards the EU integration project. Only a few of them, such as the Danish *People's Movement against the EU* (N.), are single-issue, anti-EU parties; hence, as Conti and Memoli recognized (2012, 92), “a joint anti-European front is hardly discernible, and what really exists is a plethora of dispersed Eurosceptical party stances”.

Employing a rhetoric of Euro-contestation, i.e., criticizing the EU and/or *problematising* aspects of European integration, is not sufficient to qualify a party as Eurosceptic – it appears that Eurosceptic language has become a sort of *koiné* for many parties. Furthermore, party-based Euroscepticism and Europeanism do not represent two sides of the same coin; they should rather be considered as two poles on a spectrum that includes different types of both opposition to and support for European integration. This entails that party-based Euroscepticism (as well as Europeanism) may be more or less pronounced.

In this respect, Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart have distinguished between two different forms of Euroscepticism: *hard Euroscepticism*, defined as “principled opposition to the project of European integration as embodied in the EU, in other words, based on the ceding or transfer of powers to supranational institutions such as the EU”, and *soft Euroscepticism*, defined as “opposition to the EU’s current or future planned trajectory based on the *further* extension of competencies that the EU is planning to make” (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008b, 247-248). Nicolò Conti has extended this taxonomy by adding two different forms of Europeanism (and a neutral attitude): *functional* and *identity Europeanism*; in the first, “support to European integration can be re-conducted to a strategy, serving domestic interests or a different party goal”; whereas in the second, “there is a principled support to the EU and European integration” (Conti 2003, 17; see also Flood 2002, Kopecký and Mudde 2002 and Mudde 2012).

Many Eurosceptic parties, moreover, adopt a populist political style or mentality and may therefore be properly considered populist parties. These parties generally criticize elite groups and the ruling classes; bestow a central role on their leader; produce new opportunities for a direct relationship between citizens and leaders; identify the figures of “imagined” enemies (the EU, immigrants, etc.), making them able to mobilise and polarise the electorate; and employ anti-political language (Mudde 2007; Campus 2010).

Clearly, any party may change its stances on European integration over time, primarily for strategic reasons.

To define these stances as Eurosceptic or not, many scholars have considered parties' official documents – election manifestos; party platforms; and leader's speeches (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008a, 2008b; Volkens, Bara, Best and Budge 2013) – whereas others have preferred to appeal to expert judgment (Ray 1999; Marks and Wilson 2000; Marks, Wilson and Ray 2002).

The results of these two approaches, of course, do not always correspond with one another. Thus, to develop a list of the Eurosceptic parties that competed in the 2014 European elections that is as detailed and reliable as possible, I compared the main analyses on the topic, beginning with Szczerbiak and Taggart (2008a)<sup>3</sup>. Four possible combinations came to light from this comparison:

1. All scholars agree on classifying a party as Eurosceptic;
2. Some scholars classify a party as Eurosceptic, whereas others, advancing strong arguments, do not;
3. Some scholars classify a party as Eurosceptic, whereas others, who do not advance strong arguments, do not;
4. Some scholars classify a party as Eurosceptic, whereas others do not mention it.

The first case is not problematic; in the second, I decided to not include the party in the final list; in the third and fourth cases, I decided to gather further information through both the literature and the party website: the party was classified as Eurosceptic when I failed to find evidence to contradict classifying it as such<sup>4</sup>.

Table 1 presents the final list of the Eurosceptic parties developed according to the aforementioned criteria. The list should be understood as a "picture", which is as clear as possible, of the current situation. Due to the difficulties associated with distinguishing between soft Euroscepticism and the rhetoric of Euro-contestation, certain smaller Eurosceptic parties may have been not correctly excluded, and certain smaller parties that are not Eurosceptic may have not been correctly included.

The list, which I believe may be further improved by other scholars, includes 62 parties from 26 countries. The Eurosceptic parties are present throughout Europe; moreo-

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<sup>3</sup> The others studies considered are: Conti 2004; Harmsen and Spiering 2004; Hartleb 2011; Mudde 2014; De Sio, Emanuele and Maggini 2014; Valbruzzi and Vignati 2014; Open Europe 2014.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Luca Pinto and Marta Regalia (University of Bologna) and to Pawel Swidlicki (Open Europe) for providing me with the results of their analyses.

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ver, no significant difference concerning the territorial distribution (Northern vs. Southern states), the date of EU accession (founding vs. new members), or old political and military cleavages (NATO vs. ex Warsaw Pact states) can be recorded (table 1).

**Table 1 - Eurosceptic political parties in EU member states, 2014**

Country	Party
1 AT FPÖ	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs Freedom Party of Austria
2 AT EUStop	EU-Austritt, Direkte Demokratie, Neutralität EU Stop
3 AT REKOS	Die Reformkonservativen The Reform Conservatives
4 AT BZÖ	Bündnis Zukunft Österreich Alliance for the Future of Austria
5 BE Vlaams Belang	Vlaams Belang Flemish Interest
6 BG NFSB/НФСБ	Национален фронт за спасение на България The National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria
7 BG ATAKA	Партия Атака Attack
8 CY ΑΚΕΛ - AKEL	Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού Progressive Party of Working People
9 CY ΕΛΑΜ/ELAM	Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο National Popular Front
10 CZ KSČM	Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia
11 CZ ODS	Občanská demokratická strana Civic Democratic Party
12 CZ Svobodni	Strana svobodných občanů Party of Free Citizens
13 CZ Úsvit	Úsvit přímé demokracie Dawn of Direct Democracy
14 DE Die Linke	Die Linke The Left
15 DE AfD	Alternative für Deutschland Alternative for Germany
16 DE NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands National Democratic Party of Germany
17 DE REP	Die Republikaner The Republicans
18 DK DF	Dansk Folkeparti Danish People's Party
19 DK N.	Folkebevægelsen mod EU People's Movement against the EU
20 EE EIP	Eesti Iseseisvuspartei Estonian Independence Party
21 EL SYRIZA	Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς Coalition of the Radical Left
22 EL Χ.Α.	Χρυσή Αυγή Golden Dawn
23 EL KKE	Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας Communist Party of Greece
24 EL ANEL	Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες Independent Greeks
25 EL ΛΑ.Ο.Σ./ΛΑ.Ο.Σ.	Λαϊκός Ορθόδοξος Συναγερμός Popular Orthodox Rally - G. Karatzaferis
26 ES IU	Izquierda Unida United Left
27 ES BNG	Bloque Nacionalista Galego Galician Nationalist Block
28 FI PS	Perussuomalaiset Finns Party

29	FR	FN	Front National	National Front
30	FR	PCF	Parti Communiste Français	French Communist Party
31	FR	DLR	Debout la République	Arise the Republic
32	FR	LO	Liste ouvrière	Worker's Struggle
33	FR	NPA	Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste	The New Anticapitalist Party
34	HR	HSP AS	Hrvatska stranka prava dr. Ante Starčević	Croatian Party of Rights dr. Ante Starčević
35	HU	JOBBIK	Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom	Jobbik
36	IE	SF	Sinn Féin	Sinn Féin
37	IT	M5S	MoVimento 5 Stelle	Five Star Movement
38	IT	LN	Lega Nord	Northern League
39	IT	FDI-AN	Fratelli d'Italia-Alleanza Nazionale	Brothers of Italy-National Alliance
40	LT	TT	Partija Tvarka ir teisingumas	Order and Justice
41	LV	TB/LNNK	Tēvzemei un Brīvībai	For Fatherland and Freedom
42	NL	PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid	Party for Freedom
43	NL	SP	Socialistische Partij	Socialist Party
44	NL	SGP	Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij	Dutch Reformed Political Party
45	NL	GroenLinks	GroenLinks	Green Party
46	PL	PiS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	Law and Justice
47	PL	KNP	Kongres Nowej Prawicy	Congress of the New Right
48	PL	SP	Solidarna Polska	United Poland
49	PL	RN	Ruch Narodowy	National Movement
50	PT	PCP	Partido Comunista Português	Portuguese Communist Party
51	PT	BE	Bloco de Esquerda	Left Block
52	RO	PRM	Partidul România Mare	Greater Romania Party
53	SE	MP	Miljöpartiet de gröna	The Green Party
54	SE	SD	Sverigedemokraterna	Sweden Democrats
55	SE	V	Vänsterpartiet	Left Party
56	SE	C	Centerpartiet	Centre Party
57	SI	SNS	Slovenska Nacionalna Stranka	Slovenian National Party
58	SK	SNS	Slovenská národná strana	Slovak National Party
59	SK	L'SNS	Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko	People's Party - Our Slovakia
60	UK	UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party	United Kingdom Independence Party
61	UK	Cons:	Conservative Party	Conservative Party
62	UK	DUP	Democratic Unionist Party	Democratic Unionist Party

### 3. The Eurosceptic parties' performance in the European elections of 2014

The establishment of a political group in the EP requires at least 25 members (MEPs) from seven different states; the groups are not organized by nationality, but by political affiliation. Forming or joining a political group is necessary for the parties because it ensures them access to additional funds, committee seats, chamber speaking rights and the opportunity to introduce draft proposals.

A preliminary analysis of the Eurosceptic parties' electoral performance can be performed by considering the results achieved by those EP political groups that are typically considered to be Eurosceptic (Mudde 2014): the soft Eurosceptic *European Conservatives and Reformists* (ECR), the hard Eurosceptic *Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy* (EFDD), and the *European United Left/Nordic Green Left* (EUL/NGL), which includes parties adopting both hard and soft Eurosceptic stances – the former include the *Swedish Left Party* (V), the *French Communist Party* (PCF) and the *Czech Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia* (KSČM). Finally, the Not-attached Members (NA) must also be included in the examination, as they are generally Eurosceptic (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008b).

Table 2 reports the electoral results obtained by the political groups from the first to the most recent European election (1979-2014). Clearly, nearly all of the political groups – especially the ECR and EFDD – have experienced numerous changes over time, at least before the 2009 elections; however, the comparison between the first six and the last two European elections must be made with extreme caution<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> From the 1979 to 1989 European elections, the *British Conservative party* (Cons.), the *Ulster Unionist Party* (prior to 1984) and the *Danish Conservative People's Party*, were gathered together in the *European Democratic* political group (ED). In 1992, the ED dissolved because many of its members shifted to the *European People's Party* group (EPP); in 1999 the former became a subgroup of the EPP, renamed EPP-ED group. Finally, due to David Cameron's enterprising spirit, a new conservative group, called ECR, was founded in 2009.

The EFDD, founded in 2014, is the heir to the *Europe of Freedom and Democracy* (EFD) group, formed just before the 2009 elections. This group derived from the *Union for Europe of the Nations* (UEN) and the *Independence/Democracy* (IND/DEM) groups, which emerged from the *European Democratic Alliance* (EDA) and *Forza Europa* (FE) – in the case of the former – and from the *Europe of Democracies and Diversities* (EDD) and the previous *Europe of Nations* (EDN) groups – for the latter (Maggini 2014).

Most of the parties in the UEN, EDA and FE groups chose to shift to the EPP. For this reason, I decided not to include these groups in the data elaboration regarding the EFDD group.

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**Table 2 - EP political groups 1979-2014 (percentage of MEPs; Constitutive Sessions)<sup>6</sup>**

	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014
EPP	26.3	25.3	23.4	27.5	37.2	36.6	36.0	29.4
S&D	27.3	30.0	34.7	34.9	28.8	27.3	25.0	25.4
ALDE	9.8	7.1	9.5	7.8	8.0	12.0	11.4	8.9
ECR	15.4	11.5	6.6				7.3	9.3
EFDD				3.4	2.6	5.1	4.3	6.4
EUL/NGL	10.7	9.4	8.1	4.9	6.7	5.6	4.8	6.9
GREENS/EFA		4.6	8.3	7.4	7.7	5.7	7.5	6.7
NA	2.4	1.6	2.3	4.8	1.4	4.0	3.7	6.9
Others	8.1	10.5	7.1	9.3	7.6	3.7		
Tot.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Eq	0.94	0.92	0.91	0.89	0.86	0.87	0.89	0.93

Source: Elaboration of data from [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/elections\\_results/review.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/elections_results/review.pdf) and <http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/election-results-2014.html>.

In 2014, the *European People's Party* (EPP) remains the largest political group in the EP, despite considerable losses: in the European elections of 1999, 2004 and 2009, it obtained 37.2, 36.6 and 36.0 per cent of MEPs, while in those of 2014, it won only 29.4 per cent. Thus, the gap between the EPP and the *Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats* (S&D), which obtained the same percentage of seats in 2009 and 2014, has

<sup>6</sup> *European People's Party*: 1979-94=EPP; 1999-2004=EPP-ED; 2009-14=EPP.

*Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats*: 1979-84: SOC; 1989-2004=PES; 2009-14=S&D.

*Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe*: 1979-84=L; 1989=LDR; 1994-99=ELDR; 2004-14=ALDE.

*European Conservatives and Reformists*: 1979-89=ED; 2009 and 2014=ECR.

*Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy*: 1994=EDN; 1999=EDD; 2004=IND/DEM; 2009=EFD; 2014=EFDD.

*European United Left-Nordic Green Left*: 1979-84=COM; 1989=EUL+LU; 1994=EUL; 1999-2014=EUL/NGL.

*Greens-European Free Alliance*: 1984=RBW; 1989=RBW+G; 1994=G+ERA; 1999-2014=G/EFA.

been narrowing. It follows that the distribution of parties within the 2014 EP is particularly balanced ( $E_q=0.93$ )<sup>7</sup>.

Together with the EPP, the *Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe* group has suffered the worst decline in recent years: -0.6 percentage points (PP) in 2009 and -2.5 PP in 2014. Conversely, from 2009 to 2014, the share of all Eurosceptic groups increased: the ECR by 2.0, EFDD by 2.1, and EUL/NGL by 2.1 PP; even the NA members grew (by 3.2 PP) (Table 2).

If, for the sake of argument, one were to sum the results obtained by the three Eurosceptic groups and the NA members, we would have a total of 29.6 per cent of seats; a plurality not particularly far from the forecasts expressed by many opinion polls before the elections.

To perform a more in-depth analysis, I also examined data on individual Eurosceptic parties (table 3). First, more than 30 per cent of these parties were not able to satisfy the electoral thresholds that most countries had selected<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, they failed to achieve satisfactory results throughout Europe: many parties, such as the *Freedom Party of Austria* (FPÖ), *Danish People's Party* (DF), *SYRIZA*, the *National Front* (FN), *Jobbik*, *Sinn Féin* (SF), *Five Star Movement* (M5S), *Order and Justice* (TT), *For Fatherland and Freedom* (LNNK), *Law and Justice* (PiS), and *United Kingdom Independence Party* (UKIP) achieved extraordinary success, but others, such as *Flemish Interest* (Vlaams Belang), *ATAKA*, *Progressive Party of Working People* (AKEΛ - AKEL), *Civic Democratic Party* (ODS), *Left Block* (BE), and *Greater Romania Party* (PRM) suffered painful defeats. The national contexts and political systems, therefore, appear to have played a pivotal role in affecting the electoral outcomes.

As above, no considerable difference regarding the geographical location, the date of EU accession, or old political and military cleavages can be identified (table 3).

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<sup>7</sup> The index of balance  $E_q$  has been calculated using the following formula:  $E_q = 1 - \frac{k \sum_{j=1}^k p_j^2 - 1}{k-1}$ , where  $k$  is the number of categories,  $p$  the frequency, and  $j$  the category = 1, 2, ...,  $k$ .  $E_q$  varies from 0 (minimum balance) to 1 (maximum balance) (cfr. Marradi 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Any election threshold established at the national level must not exceed five per cent.

**Table 3 - Results of the Eurosceptic parties in the European elections of 2009 and 2014**

Country	Party	Political group		Seats (%)		Difference 2009-14	Seats		Position 2014
		2009	2014	2009	2014		2009	2014	
1 AT	FPÖ	NA	NA	12.7	19.7	7.0	2	4	3
2 AT	EUStop	-	-	-	2.8	-	-	0	6
3 AT	REKOS	-	-	-	1,2	-	-	0	8
4 AT	BZÖ	-	-	4.6	0.5	-4,1	0	0	9
5 BE	Vlaams Belang	NA	NA	9.9	4.1	-5.7	2	1	10
6 BG	NFSB/HΦCB	-	-	-	3.1	-	-	0	7
7 BG	ATAKA	NA	-	12.0	3.0	-9.0	2	0	8
8 CY	ΑΚΕΛ – AKEL	UEN-NGL	UEN-NGL	34.9	27.0	-7.9	2	2	2
9 CY	ΕΛΑΜ/ELAM	-	-	0.2	2.7	2.5	0	0	7
10 CZ	KSČM	UEN-NGL	UEN-NGL	14.2	11.0	-3.2	4	3	4
11 CZ	ODS	ECR	ECR	31.5	7.7	-23.8	9	2	6
12 CZ	Svobodni	-	EFDD	1.3	5.2	3.9	0	1	7
13 CZ	Usvit	-	-	-	3.1	-	-	0	10
14 DE	Die Linke	UEN-NGL	UEN-NGL	7,5	7,4	-0,1	8	7	4
15 DE	AfD	-	ECR	-	7,1	-	-	7	5
16 DE	NPD	-	NA	-	1,0	na	na	1	10
17 DE	REP	-	-	1,3	0,4	-0,9	0	0	14
18 DK	DF	EFD	ECR	14,8	26,6	11,8	2	4	1
19 DK	N.	UEN-NGL	UEN-NGL	7,0	8,0	1,0	1	1	6
20 EE	EIP	-	-	na	1,3	na	na	0	7
21 EL	SYRIZA	UEN-NGL	UEN-NGL	4,7	26,6	21,9	1	6	1
22 EL	X.A.	-	NA	0,5	9,4	8,9	0	3	3
23 EL	KKE	UEN-NGL	NA	8,4	6,1	-2,3	2	2	6
24 EL	ANEL	-	ECR	-	3,5	-	-	1	7
25 EL	ΛΑ.Ο.Σ/ΛΑ.Ο.Σ.	EFD	-	7,2	2,7	-4,5	2	0	8
26 ES	IU	UEN-NGL	UEN-NGL	3,7	10,0	6,3	2	5	3
27 ES	BNG	Greens-EFA	UEN-NGL	2,5	2,1	-0,4	1	1	9
28 FI	PS	EFD	ECR	14,0	12,9	-1,1		2	3
29 FR	FN	NA	NA	6,3	24,9	18,6	3	23	1
30 FR	PCF	UEN-NGL	UEN-NGL	6,0	6,3	0,3	4	3	6
31 FR	DLR	-	-	1,8	3,8	2,1	0	0	7
32 FR	LO	-	-	1,2	1,0	-0,2	0	0	9
33 FR	NPA	-	-	4,9	0,3	-4,6	0	0	10

Country	Party	Political group		Seats (%)		Difference 2009-14	Seats		Position 2014
		2009	2014	2009	2014		2009	2014	
34	HR HSP AS <sup>9</sup>	-	ECR	-	41,4	-	-	1	1
35	HU JOBBIK	NA	NA	14,8	14,7	-0,1	3	3	2
36	IE SF	-	UEN-NGL	11,2	19,5	8,3	0	3	4
37	IT M5S	-	EFDD	-	21,2	-	-	17	2
38	IT LN	EFDD	NA	10,2	6,2	-4,0	9	5	4
39	IT FDI-AN	-	-	-	3,7	3,7	-	0	7
40	LT TT	EFDD	EFDD	12,2	14,3	2,0	2	2	4
41	LV TB/LNNK	ECR	ECR	7,5	14,3	6,8	1	1	2
42	NL PVV	NA	NA	17,0	13,3	-3,7	4	4	3
43	NL SP	UEN-NGL	UEN-NGL	7,1	9,6	2,5	2	2	5
44	NL SGP	ECR	ECR	6,8	7,7	0,9	2	2	7
45	NL GroenLinks	Greens-EFA	Greens-EFA	8,9	7,0	-1,9	3	2	8
46	PL PiS	ECR	ECR	27,4	31,8	4,4	15	19	2
47	PL KNP	-	NA	-	7,2	-	-	4	4
48	PL SP	-	-	-	4,0	-	-	0	6
49	PL RN	na	-	na	1,4	-	-	0	9
50	PT PCP	UEN-NGL	UEN-NGL	10,6	12,7	2,1	2	3	3
51	PT BE	UEN-NGL	UEN-NGL	10,7	4,6	-6,1	3	1	5
52	RO PRM	NA	-	8,7	2,7	-6,0	3	0	8
53	SE MP	Greens-EFA	Greens-EFA	11,0	15,3	4,3	2	2	4
54	SE SD	-	EFDD	3,3	9,7	6,4	0	2	5
55	SE V	UEN-NGL	UEN-NGL	5,7	6,3	0,6	1	1	7
56	SE C	ALDE	ALDE	5,5	6,5	1,0	1	1	6
57	SI SNS	-	-	2,9	4,0	1,2	0	0	9
58	SK SNS	EFDD	-	5,6	3,6	-2,0	1	0	10
59	SK L'SNS	na	-	na	1,7	-	na	0	11
60	UK UKIP	EFDD	EFDD	16,1	26,8	10,7	13	24	1
61	UK Cons:	ECR	ECR	27,0	23,3	-3,7	25	19	3
62	UK DUP	NA	NA	0,5	0,5	0,1	1	1	10

Source: Elaboration of data from [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/elections\\_results/review.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/elections_results/review.pdf) and <http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/election-results-2014.html>.

<sup>9</sup> In coalition with Croatian Democratic Union, Croatian Peasant Party, Bloc of United Pensioners.

#### 4. Explaining the Eurosceptic parties' growth through the "new structural conflict" hypothesis

One of the most important reasons for the expansion of Eurosceptic parties is likely the worsening of the economic crisis and its increasingly severe impact on citizens' lives. As noted above, citizens' trust in European institutions and their ability to face and address the crisis has declined; accordingly, both political élites and the mainstream political parties have often been charged to be incompetent and self-referential, whereas the peripheral parties, which are generally Eurosceptic, have achieved greater support<sup>10</sup>.

However, the crisis and, more generally, the processes of globalization/denationalization (which are closely related to the crisis itself), have not had the same effects for all citizens; a new structural conflict, opposing the "winners" and "losers" of globalization, would seem to have arisen<sup>11</sup>.

The "winners", as clarified by Hanspeter Kriesi and other scholars in a study devoted to the transformations of party political systems (Kriesi, Grande, Lachat, Dolezal, Bornschier and Frey 2008, 5 and 8), "include people who benefit from the new opportunities resulting from globalization, and whose life chances are enhanced [...], entrepreneurs and qualified employees in sectors open to international competition, as well as cosmopolitan citizens"; the "losers", on the other hand, "are people whose life chances were traditionally protected by national boundaries. They perceive the weakening of these boundaries as a threat to their social status and their social security. Their life chances and action spaces are being reduced [...]. [They include] entrepreneurs and qualified employees in traditionally protected sectors, all unqualified employees, and citizens who strongly identify themselves with their national community" (ivi, 4-5 and 8).

Kriesi has referred to this antagonism as a conflict between *integration* and *demarcation*, which comprise an economic and a cultural dimension. According to the author, these dimensions correspond to the two cleavages that structured electoral competition in the post-war period.

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<sup>10</sup> As recognized by many authors (see, for instance, Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008a, 2008b), Euroscepticism stances are primarily adopted by oppositional, peripheral and extremist parties, both on the left and the right wing. In this respect, Conti (2003), exploring the patterns of party positioning on the EU within the Italian party system, demonstrated that two dimensions of the *party's spatial positioning along the political spectrum* – the left-right ideology and the core-periphery divide – explain the parties' attitudes toward European integration.

<sup>11</sup> On this conflict, see the article by Segatori, also in this special issue.

The mobilisation of the new social movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s did not add new dimensions to the political space but altered the meaning of the cultural dimension, weakening the traditional moral and religious issues and emphasizing, on the contrary, issues such as environmentalism, peace and gender equality.

Similarly, the *integration-demarcation* conflict remains embedded in a two-dimensional political space, but the processes of globalization that occurred in the 1990s transformed the meaning of the cultural dimension once again, emphasizing issues such as European integration and immigration. On the economic dimension, therefore, a neoliberal, free trade position contrasts with a defensive, protectionist one; on the cultural dimension, an universalist and multiculturalist position is opposed to a position in favour of protecting national identity, culture and values.

An empirical analysis of voters' attitudes performed by Romain Lachat and Martin Dolezal (2008) provided evidence for the thesis advanced by Kriesi. Employing sophisticated statistical models, the two scholars demonstrated that:

- in the 1990s and 2000s, the strength of the relationship between economic and cultural attitudes is weaker than in the 1960s – this involves a greater diversification among groups of voters' attitudes;
- the cultural dimension is characterized by the most salient oppositions;
- the conflict between the “winners” and “losers” of globalization (the former represented by the well-educated and the social-cultural specialist and the latter by the less well educated and the unskilled workers) has become more substantial and salient than those rooted in traditional cleavages;
- the “winners” typically hold economic and, especially, cultural attitudes of *integration*, whereas the “losers” generally express economic and especially cultural attitudes of *demarcation*.

Ultimately, the winners and losers constitute political potentials, which can – and have – been mobilized by both old political parties, which have been compelled to reposition themselves within the political space, and new ones. Among the latter, one can include *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) and the Italian *Five Star Movement* (M5S).

AfD, founded in 2013 by Bernd Lucke, professor of Macroeconomics at the University of Hamburg, opposes the Euro, which it believes has undermined European integration, and calls for the return of the national currencies or the formation of smaller and more stable monetary unions (e.g., the “Northern Euro”); M5S, formed in 2009 by the comedian Beppe Grillo, attacks the traditional parties and professional politicians, calls for a national referendum on the retention of Euro, and seeks to activate “the potential ‘protest energy’ widespread in a considerable section of public opinion” (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013, 2).

As several studies have shown (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008a; 2008b), the mainstream political parties tend to take the “winners” side, while the peripheral parties tend to adopt a “loser’s” programme and use Euro-scepticism as a mobilizing issue. Clearly, the parties of the radical left express different positions on European issues than those adopted by the parties of the populist right: the former oppose market integration, economic liberalization and open borders because of the threats they pose to the left’s national social achievements; the latter, though not neglecting economic issues such as leaving the Euro or abolishing the fiscal compact, are more seriously concerned by the threats to national identity caused by the European integration process and, more generally, by the opening of borders. It is no coincidence that the right-wing parties are primarily characterized by xenophobic, if not racist, stances or restrictive positions with respect to immigration.

However, if the cultural dimension of the conflict between *integration* and *demarcation* currently holds greater salience than the economic one, it follows that the populist right’s appeal to the “losers” fears (such as cultural liberalism, immigration, and European integration) will likely exert a greater influence on the mobilization of the “losers” than the protection of their economic interests advanced by the radical left (Kriesi *et al.* 2008). Several populist right parties have also begun to acquire a significant support among voters who were traditionally supporters of the left and even have expanded into territories characterised by the presence of a distinctive political sub-culture that has always fostered the success of left-wing parties.

The small town of Hénin-Beaumont (27 thousand inhabitants), in the French region Nord-Pas-de-Calais, symbolises this transformation. Hénin-Beaumont has always been a blue-collar town and a traditional stronghold of the left; it has experienced tragic workers’ struggles, and since 1789, it has always been led by mayors from the leftist parties. However, in the local elections of March 2014, the *National Front* (FN) obtained 50.3 per cent of the vote, becoming the largest party; Steeve Brios, a close associate of Marine Le Pen, became the new mayor (Valli 2014).

In Italy, beginning with the parliamentary elections of 2008, the Northern League (LN) began to expand even into the regions of Central Italy (the so-called ‘Red Belt’), in which the parties of the left have always enjoyed very high levels of support. In the 2008 elections, the League obtained 4.4 per cent of the vote, and elected ten candidates to Parliament. In the European elections in the following year, it obtained 7.3 per cent and one MEP; in the regional elections of 2010, it won 9.5 per cent and elected eleven councillors. In 2010, the League was the third-largest party after the *People of Freedom* (Pdl), the main centre-right party, and the *Democratic Party* (PD), the main centre-left party (Barbieri 2012).

## 5. Conclusions

If, as observed, the 2014 European elections represented an important turning point for the Eurosceptic parties, it is necessary at this point to offer an assessment of their performance. In this respect, it should be noted that the electoral results cannot be perceived in an unitary way, as they include both positive and negative aspects.

Clearly, the Eurosceptic parties obtained an unprecedentedly large percentage of votes, but no “political earthquake”, “sweeps”, or “Europe’s populist backlash” – as predicted by an impatient press before the elections – occurred. While suffering a decline of 5.1 percentage points, the EPP remained the majority group in the EP; the former Luxembourg Prime Minister, Jean-Claude Juncker, leading candidate of the EPP, took charge of the European Commission; a new grand coalition of the EPP, S&D and ALDE will likely be formed. The Eurosceptic parties, therefore, will not have substantial authority within the EP.

Furthermore, as previously highlighted, the Eurosceptic parties have never been able to form a joint anti-European front, because of both their different stances, purposes, and aspirations and, above all, their mutual mistrust.

A detailed consideration of the negotiations that the various Eurosceptic parties, especially those in the right-wing camp, undertook to form the new EP groups may be extremely useful to clarify this issue. No extreme right or neo-fascist party, such as the Bulgarian *Attack*, the Greek *Golden Dawn* (X.A.) or the Hungarian *Jobbik*, has ever been allowed to join any EP group. The attempts made by Marine Le Pen, leader of the FN, and Geert Wilders, leader of the *Dutch Freedom Party* (PVV), to form a new political group, called the *European Alliance for Freedom* (EFA), failed. The two most prominent figures in the potential alliance managed to ally with the *Freedom Party of Austria* (FPÖ), the Italian *Northern League* (LN), and the Belgian *Flemish Interest* (Vlaams Belang) but were unable to secure the necessary support of two additional parties. The negotiations opened by the FN with the Polish *Congress of the New Right* (KNP) were quickly interrupted by Wilders, who deemed the misogynistic and anti-Semitic positions of its leader, Janusz Korwin-Mikke, intolerable; speaking at a party rally held in The Hague, the capital city of the province of South Holland and the seat of government in the Netherlands, on May 22, 2014, Wilders said: “The Freedom Party wants to form a parliamentary group but not at any price”; he added that cooperating with the KNP would have been “a bridge too far”. The defection of Angel Dschambaski, MEP of the *Bulgarian National Movement* (BND), also contributed to the failure of the proposed alliance.



Nigel Farage, leader of the *United Kingdom Independence Party* (UKIP), by contrast, was able to form the EFDD group, which is, however, the smallest political group in the EP and has MEPs – one of whom is Joëlle Bergeron, an FN defector – from only seven member states. Moreover, two parties from the ex-EFD group, the *Danish People's Party* (DF) and the *Finns Party* (PS), preferred to join the ECR group. In the first official EFDD meeting after the elections, Farage declared that he would not accept the possible future entry of those parties that supported the formation of the EFA group.

Thus, it would appear that each Eurosceptic party has a rather negative opinion of its fellow Eurosceptic parties; in particular, the centre-right parties consider the right parties to be extremists, and neither wishes to have anything to do with the far-right and neo-fascist parties. “He’s worse than me”, could be the statement that best epitomizes the relationships within the Eurosceptic right-wing camp.

It should be noted, however, that several Eurosceptic parties, such as the DF, *Syriza*, the FN, and the UKIP, received the most votes in their respective countries in the European election, and others, such as the Italian *Five Star Movement* (M5S), the Latvian *For Fatherland and Freedom* (LNNK), and the Polish *Law and Justice* (PiS), reached second place. It would appear, therefore, that these parties were able to move away from the *niche* positions they have typically held in the electoral market and, thereby, became influential players in the national political arena. In pursuing their goals, they will likely encounter fewer obstacles in the national arena than in the European one. Accordingly, the other parties will likely attempt to reposition themselves within the political space to check the Eurosceptics’ advance. The British *Conservative Party*, for instance, shaken by the UKIP’s astonishing electoral growth, has recently adopted a Eurosceptic tone, and its leader, Prime Minister David Cameron, decided to renegotiate the terms of Britain’s membership and hold a referendum on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU.

In conclusion, the Eurosceptic parties do not appear to have passed the electoral test with flying colours, although their further success could just be postponed. As I have argued, the electoral constituency of these parties is formed, above all, by the “losers” of globalization; therefore, this implies that further exacerbation of the economic crisis and/or the inability of the EU institutions in addressing it could lead such parties toward new and more considerable achievements.

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